
Howard County Department of Citizen Services Office of Consumer Affairs

FY2013 Annual Report

Information / Education / Outreach

of Inquiries Received (telephone, e-mail, walk-ins)

FY	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Total
2013	210	149	166	151	146	98	150	146	102	171	172	166	1827
2012	195	244	171	201	165	147	217	138	146	182	140	171	2117
2011	162	200	222	159	213	105	184	194	161	160	160	211	2131
2010	126	217	181	235	105	171	163	133	209	185	179	181	2085
2009	137	97	97	94	112	148	140	152	144	147	123	131	1522

Top Subjects of Inquiries Received in FY2013

1. Rental Housing
2. Peddlers / Solicitors
3. Repairs / Services
4. Trespass Towing
5. Telemarketing

Education Efforts

	Fairs / Public Events	Presentations	OCA Alerts and Press Stories	Social Media Posts	
				Facebook	Twitter
FY2013	7	10	7	184	11
FY2012	5	19	33	322	23
FY2011	2	28	24	223	

Highlight: On June 13, 2013, over 70 people attended OCA's first public forum on identity theft. The forum featured a panel of experts from the Federal Trade Commission, AARP, the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition and the Howard County Police Department, who discussed common ID Theft schemes, how children and seniors are targeted, how people can avoid ID Theft and what victims can do to restore their identities. Following the panel discussion, the audience asked questions and engaged the panel in lively discussion.

Complaint Resolution

of Complaints Opened/Closed

FY	Complaints Opened					Complaints Closed				
	1 st Qtr	2 nd Qtr	3 rd Qtr	4 th Qtr	Total	1 st Qtr	2 nd Qtr	3 rd Qtr	4 th Qtr	Total
2013	72	40	66	71	249	70	52	53	71	246
2012	76	70	58	66	268	73	57	60	88	278
2011	61	33	74	55	223	56	48	56	50	210
2010	64	44	42	57	207	54	40	60	70	224
2009	68	57	53	55	233	56	78	58	54	246

Top Subjects of Complaints Closed in FY13

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Rental Housing | 4. Cable / Satellite Service |
| 2. Home Improvement | 5. Trespass Towing |
| 3. New Home Construction | |

Restitution Obtained Through Mediation

FY	1 st Qtr	2 nd Qtr	3 rd Qtr	4 th Qtr	Total
2013	\$23,604	\$9,621	\$5,557	\$34,286	\$73,068
2012	\$11,488	\$8,545	\$23,390	\$7,078	\$50,501
2011	\$22,176	\$17,650	\$5,550	\$13,922	\$59,298
2010	\$14,295	\$4,413	\$11,422	\$30,207	\$60,337
2009	\$32,498	\$55,542	\$6,969	\$9,680	\$104,689

Complaint Resolution Obtained

FY	# Complaints With Consumer Relief	% of Complaints With Consumer Relief	Average # of Days Open to Close
FY2013	180	84%	43
FY2012	158	80%	54
FY2011	121	74%	59
FY2010	149	87%	45
FY2009	138	84%	71

Licensing & Enforcement Activity

Licensing Activity

	Peddlers/ Solicitors	Trespass Towing
FY2013	216	10
FY2012	99	12
FY2011	142	12
FY2010	167	10
FY2009	209	13

Investigations / Enforcement Activity Concluded in FY2013

Merchant	Allegations	Type of Action Taken	Result
Cohen Recycling	Failed to obtain trespass tow license prior to towing vehicle.	Cease and Desist Order and Citation issued 5/8/12.	Paid \$500 fine 9/7/12.
Direct Buy	Advertised gifts that were contingent on consumers attending sales presentation in violation of Maryland law.	Cease & Desist Order issued 9/11/12. 2 nd violation. C&D Order issued 2/19/13	10/10/2012: C&D lifted per letter agreement to stop employee practices. 4/10/13: new letter agreement covering contractors as well as employees. Paid \$500 fine.
M&D Construction	Contracted to perform home improvement services without MD Home Improvement Contractor's license	Cease and Desist Order issued 1/11/13 and referred to MHIC for further action.	No reports of continued solicitations in Howard County.
Nu Look Home Design	Soliciting without County solicitor's license.	Cease & Desist Order issued 8/30/12.	No reports of continued solicitations in Howard County.
PLE t/a Miles Towing	3 violations of County trespass tow laws	Cease & Desist Order and Citations issued 8/10/12.	11/30/12 - Paid \$750 fine.
Prestige Windows	Soliciting without County Solicitor's license	Citation issued 9/27/12.	Case dropped (consumer refused to testify). Merchant obtained licenses on 4/24/13 under Code of Ethics Exception.
River Front Apartments	Lease provisions that were inconsistent with County trespass towing requirements	Investigation arising out of complaint filed 12/10/12.	Signed letter agreement 1/7/13 to remove improper towing provisions from leases.
Verizon	Consumers charged more for services than price quoted, and consumers charged for services not requested	Investigation arising out of complaint filed 2/8/11.	Practices changed. Signed letter agreement 10/31/12 to not engage in deceptive or unfair trade practices in the future. Paid \$30,000 to be used for consumer education efforts.